

## 'What Is Going on There Is Gross': Why Attorneys Are Tracking This Federal Lawsuit

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By Robert Storace | February 05, 2021

A segment of attorneys say they will be tracking the progress of a federal lawsuit filed Thursday alleging the mistreatment of inmates, especially those with mental health disabilities, at the super maximum security prison located at Northern Correctional Institution in Somers.



"Prisoner rights lawyers will definitely be looking at this case. I've seen the lawsuit and read the pleading and depositions in other cases and what is going on there is gross," said Hartford solo practitioner [Ken Krayeske](#), who has represented about 15 prisoners in his 10 years as an attorney.

Krayeske, who has no involvement in the [federal lawsuit filed](#) this week, called Northern Correctional Institution barbaric.

"This lawsuit looks to chip away at the contours of how Northern operates," he said.

The lawsuit alleges inhumane conditions at the 26-year-old prison, including the use of prolonged isolation and in-cell shackling of incarcerated inmates, including those with mental illness.

The lawsuit came from Disability Rights Connecticut Inc., whose mission is to provide legal advocacy and legal rights protection to a wide range of people with disabilities.

Disability Rights Connecticut's executive director [Deborah Dorfman](#), who is also an attorney, said she thinks the lawsuit could inform and guide attorneys in future cases against the institution.

“We think this lawsuit can give attorneys a real view of what is going on at Northern. They will have a better understanding of the institution and can better advocate for their clients. For example, if they represent persons with mental health disabilities that are in need of treatment, that attorney can start advocating for them early so they can avoid being sent to Northern at all. This is a wake-up call for what is going on at Northern,” Dorfman said Friday.

The complaint addresses all prisoners at Northern, but puts a focus on those with mental illness.

“[The Department of Correction's] abhorrent mistreatment of prisoners with mental illness constitutes cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution,” the complaint reads.

“DOC routinely confines individuals with mental illness at Northern where they face prolonged isolation and abuse. Most prisoners spend at least 22 hours per day on weekdays, and 24 hours per day on weekends, in concrete cells where they live in a world of near total social and sensory deprivation,” the lawsuit continues. “Northern staff also retaliate against prisoners with mental illness by shackling and chaining them along in ‘strip cells’ for even minor disciplinary violations that are often manifestations of their mental illness.”

Dorfman said inmates in so-called strip cells are “almost naked and are barefoot in a cell that is freezing cold. They are often shackled and the cell is usually filthy and covered with feces and urine.”

The defendants are Connecticut’s DOC; Angel Quiros, acting commissioner of the DOC; and prison warden Roger Bowles.

Representing the defendants is the Office of Connecticut Attorney General. Spokeswoman Elizabeth Benton said Friday the office was reviewing the lawsuit and had no comment at press time.

The remedies the plaintiffs seek include, among other things, having a judge issue a judgment declaring the prolonged isolation of inmates as cruel and unusual in violation of the Eighth and 14th amendments of the U.S. Constitution.

Representing the plaintiffs are attorneys Dan Barrett and Elana Bildner with the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut and attorney Hope Metcalf of Yale Law School.